

THE SELF-ESTEEM WORKBOOK FOR TEENS

*an instant help book for teens*

the  
self-esteem  
workbook for teens



activities to  
help you build  
confidence and  
achieve your goals

\* **stop** putting  
yourself down

\* **accept** who  
you are

\* **leave**  
insecurity  
behind

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# contents

To Parents and Helping Professionals

Introduction

**ACTIVITY 1. WHAT HEALTHY SELF-ESTEEM MEANS**

**ACTIVITY 2. YOUR STORY**

**ACTIVITY 3. YOUR POSITIVES**

**ACTIVITY 4. BRAIN CHEMICAL MESSAGES**

**ACTIVITY 5. FAMILY MESSAGES**

**ACTIVITY 6. SOCIAL MESSAGES**

**ACTIVITY 7. SELF-MESSAGES**

**ACTIVITY 8. THE TRUTH ABOUT HUMAN WORTH**

**ACTIVITY 9. THE PERFECTION OF DIVERSITY**

**ACTIVITY 10. ABOUT BODIES**

**ACTIVITY 11. ABOUT MISTAKES**

**ACTIVITY 12. ABOUT COMPARING**

**ACTIVITY 13. ABOUT JUDGMENT**

**ACTIVITY 14. YOUR AUTHENTIC SELF**

**ACTIVITY 15. WHO YOU ARE FOR YOUR FAMILY**

**ACTIVITY 16. WHO YOU ARE FOR YOUR FRIENDS**

**ACTIVITY 17. WHO YOU ARE FOR SOCIETY**

**ACTIVITY 18. IT'S NORMAL TO NOT KNOW**

**ACTIVITY 19. DISCOVERING YOUR LIKES AND DISLIKES**

**ACTIVITY 20. DISCOVERING YOUR DREAMS**

**ACTIVITY 21. DISCOVERING YOUR BELIEFS**

**ACTIVITY 22. DISCOVERING YOUR PASSIONS**

**ACTIVITY 23. PEER PRESSURE**

**ACTIVITY 24. YOU IN THE UNIVERSE**

**ACTIVITY 25. WHY YOU ARE HERE**

**ACTIVITY 26. THE POWER OF ATTITUDE**

**ACTIVITY 27. THE POWER OF MANAGING FEELINGS**

**ACTIVITY 28. THE POWER OF TOLERATING DISCOMFORT**

**ACTIVITY 29. THE POWER OF RESPONSIBILITY**

**ACTIVITY 30. THE POWER OF INTUITION**

**ACTIVITY 31. THE POWER OF GRATITUDE**

**ACTIVITY 32. THE POWER OF COMPASSION**

**ACTIVITY 33. THE POWER OF POSSIBILITY**

**ACTIVITY 34. THE POWER OF YOUR THOUGHTS**

**ACTIVITY 35. THE POWER OF CONVICTION**

**ACTIVITY 36. THE POWER OF POSITIVE DECISIONS**

**ACTIVITY 37. THE POWER OF FACING CHALLENGES HEAD ON**

**ACTIVITY 38. THE POWER OF REALISTIC GOALS**

**ACTIVITY 39. THE POWER OF SUPPORT**

**ACTIVITY 40. THE POWER OF A HIGHER POWER**

# what healthy self-esteem means

## know this

**H**aving healthy self-esteem means you have a strong sense of self-worth. You understand and accept your weaknesses, and you appreciate and celebrate your strengths. When you have healthy self-esteem, you recognize the inborn value of all people, including yourself.

*When Kati was younger, she thought everyone else was better than her—more attractive,*

*One day she saw her neighbor Tom practicing karate. Kati had always looked up to Tom; he could talk to anyone and always seemed at ease. She watched how peaceful and focused he was as he moved, and how strong he seemed, both physically and mentally.*

*“You are so smart and cool and confident,” Kati told Tom. “I’ve always wished I could be like you. I get upset, I make mistakes, I say dumb things.”*

*Tom put his arm around Kati and smiled. “Everyone gets upset, makes mistakes, and says dumb things sometimes. Everyone has fears and faults and insecurities—you just may not see them from the outside. Did you know I was so shy in grade school that I cried every morning before I got on the bus? And that I practice karate to manage anxiety?”*

*“But I thought you were so together!” Kati said.*

*“I’m human, just like you,” Tom said. “You’re just overly focused on your own imperfections and others’ strengths, and you’re basing your self-worth on that. We all come into this world the same, Kati. When you realize how equal everyone is, you’ll feel better about yourself. Accept yourself and everyone else—we’re all valuable, no matter what.”*

**try this**

People with healthy self-esteem are certain enough of all people's value that they can admit their faults without feeling ashamed and celebrate their strengths without putting others down.

For each of the following conversations, and check the reply you think illustrates the healthiest self-esteem:

"Congratulations on winning the freestyle swim relay!"

"Thanks, it feels good. And you won the diving competition—that's great!"

"I don't know why I won. I don't have good form."

"Yeah, I made those other swimmers look like tadpoles!"

"I hear Patrick broke up with you. How are you feeling?"

"Couldn't be better. I was planning to dump him anyway. He was dragging me down."

"I figured it would happen. No one sticks with me once they get to know me."

"I was pretty sad for a while, but I'm better now."

"Excuse me, but I think you're in the wrong seat. Could you check your ticket?"

“Oh, sorry! I always mess things up!”

“Excuse me, but I was here first. Why don’t you find an empty seat?”

“You’re right; I apologize. I’m supposed to be in the row behind.”

“Hey, that’s my sweater. You didn’t ask if you could borrow it!”

“Sorry. You weren’t home, but I should have asked you first.”

“Quit whining. It looks better on me anyway.”

“I don’t know what I was thinking. It doesn’t even look good on me. I’ll give you one of mine to make up for it.”

## now try this

Name someone you know who appears to be “perfect.”

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List some of that person’s imperfections or challenges.



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Describe yourself from a perspective of unhealthy self-esteem, ignoring your strengths, emphasizing your imperfections, and thinking that others are better than you.

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Describe yourself from a perspective of healthy self-esteem, recognizing your strengths, accepting your imperfections, and knowing that all people have equal value.

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## today's affirmation

**NO MATTER WHAT OUR STRENGTHS OR WEAKNESSES, WE ALL HAVE VALUE, INCLUDING  
ME.**

## your story

### know this

**E**veryone has a story, and everyone's story is important. It doesn't matter who your friends are, where you go to school, what your grades are, or whether your life is what you want it to be. Your story is yours alone.

We all are who we are today as a result of everything that has happened to us. Every event of our lives, every person we've met, every experience we've had has helped contribute to who we are right at this moment.

Each person's story is unique. Even if we live in the same town, go to the same school, or are in the same family, we have each traveled a unique path to arrive at this place, reading this book, at this very moment.

Knowing your story is a place to start knowing yourself. Your story is your history. Exploring it helps you understand how you came to be who you are. Telling your story allows you to honor it, and to honor and respect yourself. You deserve that, even if you don't believe it right now.

Your unique story carries information about what has happened to you. It also carries feelings, both positive and negative. Telling your story is a way to explore, recognize, and honor your life. It gives you a chance to start becoming comfortable looking inside yourself and seeing who you are.

## try this

On a separate sheet of paper, make a list of significant memories from your life; for example, starting or changing schools, meeting or losing a friend, the birth of a sibling, achievements or losses, weddings or divorces, travels, and happy or difficult times. Next to each event, write the age you were when it occurred.

Write a zero at the left end of the horizontal line below. Write your current age at the right end. Transfer the items from your list to this timeline, placing each according to when it occurred. Write the age you were next to each event. If you are noting a positive memory, write it above the line. If you are noting a negative memory, write it below the line. If all your information doesn't fit, create your timeline on a separate piece

of paper.

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When you are done, look back at your timeline. Describe any observations or feelings you have.

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### now try this

Now tell your story in actual story form. (Do this on other paper or at the keyboard so you have as much space as you need.) This is not an English assignment; there are no rules for composition, spelling, or grammar. Just let your story flow in whatever way it comes. You might begin with “Once upon a time ...”; “I was born on ...”; or “My earliest memory is ....”

You might simply provide details about the life events on your timeline, or you could include more

information about your birth; your family members; your different homes, schools, teachers, or other influential people; friends; vacations; or anything else that is part of your history. Your story can be as long or short as you like.

When you are done, read your story aloud to someone you trust. Describe what it felt like to write and share your personal life story.

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**today's affirmation**

**MY PERSONAL STORY IS UNIQUE AND IMPORTANT, AND SO AM I.**

## your positives

### know this

**I**t doesn't matter who you are, where you have been, or what path you have taken. It doesn't matter what you have done or not done, said or not said, thought or not thought. Today, right now, you have positive qualities. Discovering them, acknowledging them, and embracing them are steps toward healthy self-esteem.

*Maya's life seemed to get worse every day. Her classes were too hard this year; she couldn't keep up. Her best friend rarely talked to her anymore; she felt lonely. Her brother had won yet another*

*award; she would never be as talented as he was. And last week she had been caught shoplifting some makeup. The store manager didn't press charges because he knew her family, but he did call her parents to tell them. Maya felt like such a loser, like she didn't fit in anywhere.*

*When her dad knocked on her bedroom door that day, Maya cringed. Here comes a lecture, she thought. And I'll be grounded for life. But Maya's dad didn't ground her. He said that he was worried. He said that Maya was really hard on herself, and that he often heard her put herself down. Maya's dad told her she deserved to celebrate all the wonderful things about herself instead of always focusing on the things she didn't like.*

*"But there is nothing good about me," said Maya. "All I do is mess up over and over again."*

*"If that's what you want to believe, you'll never be happy," her dad said. "Do you ever think about what a good artist you are or how much your mom and I love you? About your friends who have stuck by you since grade school? About why the Meyers ask you to babysit so often or how helpful you are to Mom when she has to work weekends? You have wonderful, positive qualities, Maya. You just don't see them because you're so busy focusing on what you don't like about yourself."*

**try this**



Describe a time when you may have felt like Maya did. What was going on in your life?

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Person after person can point out your positive qualities, but no one can make you believe. Deciding what you will focus on about yourself is your choice. Describe how you feel when you focus on things you don't like about yourself.

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Describe how you feel when you focus on things you do like about yourself.

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Sometimes our brains play tricks and try to tell us that our positives aren't real or that someone who gives us a compliment is lying. Does this ever happen to you? If so, give an example.

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Think about deciding which of your thoughts you will choose to believe. Would you consider changing

from focusing on the things you don't like about yourself to the things you do like? Tell why or why not.

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## now try this

Positives aren't all about what you win or achieve. They are also about what you attempt, what you think, and who you are. Just reading this book is a positive. It means you are willing to try something new. It means you have hope and courage and are open to change.

Circle any of the following positives that are true about you.

good listener loyal honest

kind to animals talented at a sport reliable

good sense of humor hardworking smart

patient kind to people good friend

sincere loving brave

clean responsible talented at a hobby

Give examples of each of the positives you circled; for example, if you circled "patient," describe a

specific time when you expressed patience, or tell about the circumstances when you usually notice yourself acting with patience.

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Ask three or more people what they would name as your positives and record their answers below.

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today's affirmation

**I RECOGNIZE AND ACCEPT MY POSITIVE QUALITIES.**

## brain chemical messages

### know this

**T**he way you feel about yourself has partly to do with your brain's physical makeup. The way different parts of your brain work, along with the amount and activity of your brain chemicals, are factors initially inherited from your ancestors, just like your height and your hair color.

Our brains are amazing and complex organs. They are the computer centers of our bodies. They regulate and maintain everything our bodies do, including influencing our self-esteem.

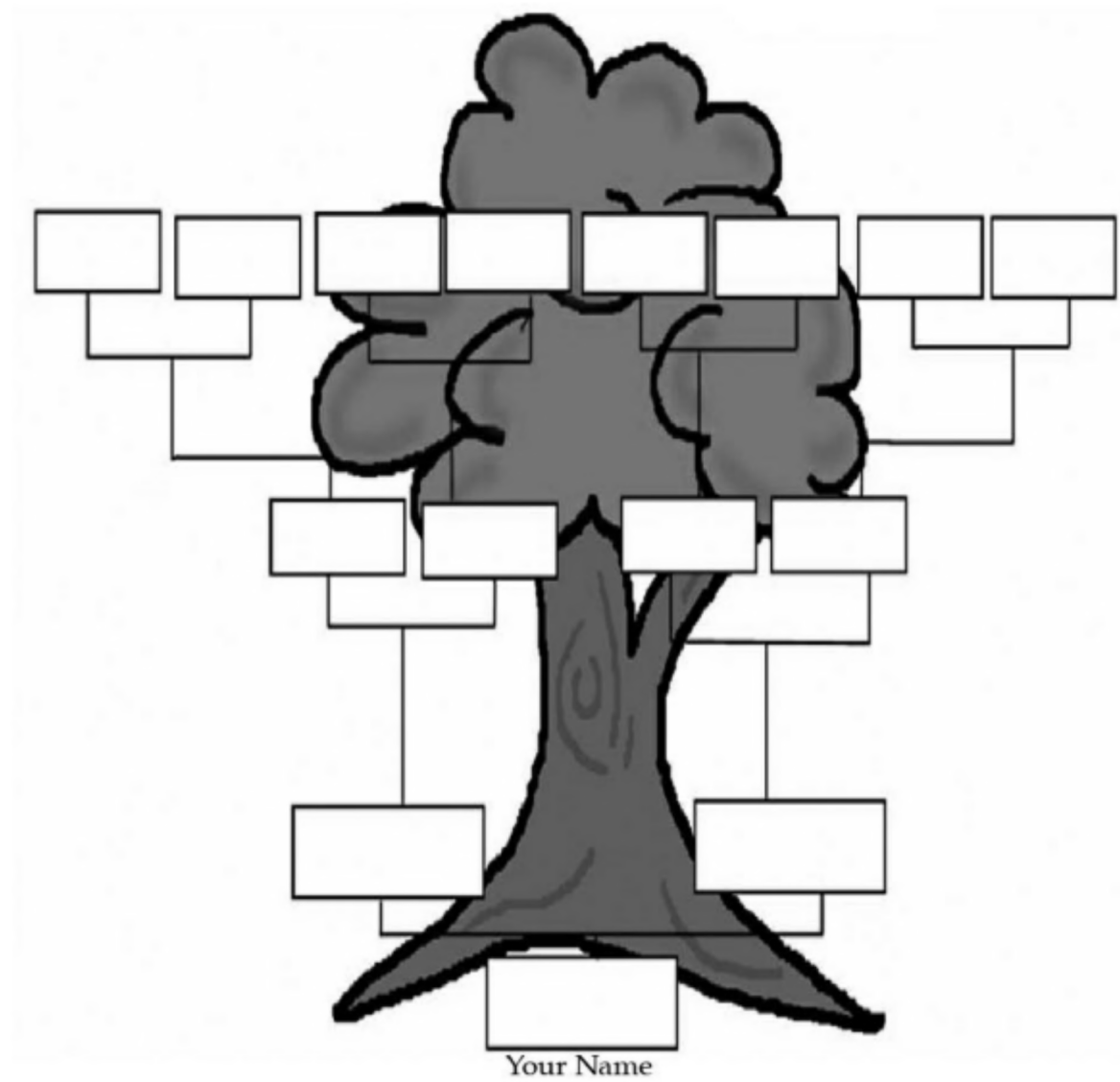
Different parts of the brain have different functions. For example, the deep limbic system sets the emotional tone of the mind. It influences our ability to see things in a positive or negative light. When the deep limbic system is working too hard, we tend to be negatively focused. This can lower self-esteem. Another part of the brain is the basal ganglia system, which affects our level of anxiety and nervousness. Excessive activity in this area can contribute to unfounded feelings of being judged or scrutinized. The prefrontal cortex regulates attention and organizational skills; the cingulate system affects flexibility and cooperation; and the temporal lobes affect memory, emotional stability, and aggression. Overly heightened or diminished activity in any area can affect our behavior and the way we feel about ourselves.

Along with the various systems, our brains also function with the help of chemicals, or neurotransmitters. The amount of these chemicals and their movement patterns affect our moods, perceptions, and behaviors. For example, the chemical serotonin contributes to feelings of well-being and happiness. Dopamine is associated with the brain's reward system and provides motivation. Norepinephrine affects our attention and focus. Excessively low or high levels of any of these neurotransmitters may increase our vulnerability to depression.

The physiology of our newborn brains is an inheritance from our parents. When we understand what we brought into the world genetically, we know more about what we are working with to create healthy self-esteem.

## try this

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Create a “genetic family tree” by filling in the picture with information about family members who came before you. Write the names of your parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents above if possible. Add names of aunts, uncles, and cousins if you can. Under each name, write a word or two describing the person’s basic personality traits. Use the words below, or choose your own.

Note: If you don’t know enough about your relatives, you might ask other family members for input. However, you should respect the privacy of anyone who is not comfortable sharing information.

anxious

happy-go-lucky

eccentric

addicted

depressed

creative

pessimistic

optimistic

artistic

loner



laid-back

moody

high-strung

shy

overbearing

quirky

social

introverted

loud

high-achieving

quiet

extroverted

funny

aggressive

perfectionist

intellectual

lazy

spiritual

fearful

brave

rebellious

passive

industrious

rigid

adventurous

## now try this

Looking over the picture you just created, answer these questions:

Which relatives do you think your personality is most similar to?

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Which relatives do you think your personality is least similar to?

\_\_\_\_\_

Which relatives do people say your personality reminds them of, and why?

\_\_\_\_\_

Describe any personality patterns you see in your family tree.

\_\_\_\_\_

Describe how you think your current self-esteem may or may not be affected by your brain chemistry.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Based on any influence of your genetic family history, describe areas in which you may need to work to help create healthy self-esteem for yourself.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## today's affirmation

**MY CURRENT SELF-ESTEEM WAS PARTLY SHAPED BY BIOLOGY— SOMETHING  
ORIGINALLY BEYOND MY CONTROL.**

## family messages

### know this

**H**ow you feel about yourself today has partly to do with the messages you received as a child from people in your family. The way you interpreted those messages as a child helped you feel good or bad about yourself. When you evaluate the same messages as a young adult, you can decide which you want to keep believing and which you don't.

*Dylan sat in fourth-period stress group and felt confused. Other kids had situations worse than his; it seemed they had more reason to feel stressed. He just had thoughts in his head—things he'd been told*

*that made him feel bad about himself. But the thoughts were so loud and strong, it felt like they had the power to ruin his whole life. He felt embarrassed to bring them up to the group, so he told Ms. Chaney, the group leader, about them later.*

*“I keep hearing this voice in my head telling me I’m not good enough,” he said. “It drives me crazy. No matter what I do, I always feel bad about myself.”*

*“Did anyone ever actually tell you that you weren’t good enough?” asked Ms. Chaney.*

*“Just my dad, when I was little. He always told me I should try to improve at soccer, try to improve my grades, try to improve my attitude, try to improve everything, I guess. And even when I did get better, he would tell me to improve more.”*

*“Your current thoughts make sense then,” said Ms. Chaney. “The messages we receive as children stick with us. They are especially powerful when they come from our parents or guardians, because these are the most important people in our lives. We literally depend on them for survival. Their messages are the first ideas we have about ourselves, and they go a long way toward shaping our self-image and self-esteem.*

*“Ideally, we are raised by perfectly healthy people who send us only perfectly healthy messages. In reality, however, we all are raised by human beings who are doing the best they can, but are nonetheless imperfect and at any given moment may not be capable of giving healthy love or sending*

*positive messages. What's most important to understand is that negative messages don't reflect our true worth.*

*“As young children, we usually believe all the messages we receive without question. As a young adult, you have the ability to look at those messages more carefully and determine which are helping you create healthy self-esteem and which aren't. You have the power to let go of any messages that aren't serving you well.”*

## try this

Why do you think Dylan's father might have repeatedly told him to improve himself?

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How do you think this felt for Dylan?

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\_\_\_\_\_

Do you think that Dylan's father did or didn't love him?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

To create healthier self-esteem, what could Dylan do about the continued thought that he isn't good enough?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## now try this

Underline any of the following messages family members may have sent you, either explicitly or by implication.

"You're not trying hard enough."



“You’re not good enough.”

“You’ll never be able to do that.”

“Why can’t you be more like your brother (sister)?”

“You drive me crazy.”

“Why are you doing this to me?”

“When are you going to grow up?”

“Are you stupid or something?”

“It’s your fault that I’m like this.”

“You could have done better.”

“You don’t have any right to feel angry.”

“How will you ever get anywhere in life?”

“Now look what you’ve done.”

“Can’t you do anything right?”

“Let’s hope you grow out of that.”

Write any messages you “hear in your head” that affect your self-esteem but are not listed above.

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Tell how these messages affect how you feel about yourself today.

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On a separate piece of paper, rewrite the messages you'd like to eliminate from your mind. Put them through a shredder or rip them up and throw them away. Remind yourself that you have a choice about which messages you continue to tell yourself.

## today's affirmation

**I CAN LET GO OF FAMILY MESSAGES THAT DON'T CONTRIBUTE TO HEALTHY SELF-ESTEEM.**

## social messages

### know this

**T**he way you feel about yourself today has partly to do with the messages you received as a child from the society you live in. How you interpreted these messages as a child helped you feel good or bad about yourself. As a young adult, you can decide which you want to keep believing and which you don't.

*Mr. Hannon's class was talking about social messages that pass on cultural beliefs. Kids were supposed to give examples from radio, TV, Internet, newspapers, and magazines.*

*“All I hear is ads for cars,” said Max. “What’s the hottest, fastest, and the best mileage.”*

*“I look at magazines and TV and hear that everyone is supposed to be thin and beautiful,” said Whitney. “It drives me crazy—I’ll never look like those ads.”*

*“Everything is about getting rich,” said Jared. “There are always ads for making more money.”*

*“I hear more and more ads for living ‘green,’” said Lauren. “We’re supposed to reduce, reuse, and recycle to save our environment.”*

*“Those are all good examples,” said Mr. Hannon. “The media passes on the beliefs of society. You’re telling me that some things our society values are cars, beauty, money, and saving the environment.”*

*“Now think about how you have personally been affected by those messages. How is your self-esteem affected if you do or don’t have or do the things society says are valuable and acceptable?”*

## try this

What TV shows did you watch as a child?

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What messages did these shows send about what your society valued?

\_\_\_\_\_

What were the beliefs about the “best” way to look and dress?

\_\_\_\_\_

What commercials do you remember seeing?

\_\_\_\_\_

What did these commercials tell you about what your society valued?

\_\_\_\_\_

Even if you didn’t understand it then, what do you remember hearing about political issues?

\_\_\_\_\_

What do you remember learning in school about what your society accepted and valued?

\_\_\_\_\_

Reading back over your answers to these questions, describe how any of those social messages may have influenced who you are or how you feel about yourself today.

\_\_\_\_\_

Which messages would you like to continue having influence over you? Which ones would you like to stop believing?

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## now try this

If you could create your own society, what would it be like?

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What messages would you send to children to help them develop healthy self-esteem?

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Tell how your life might have been the same or different if you had received these messages as a child.

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Read these messages to yourself in front of the mirror.

today's affirmation

**I DON'T HAVE TO BELIEVE ALL THE MESSAGES THAT SOCIETY FEEDS ME.**

## self-messages

### know this

**T**he way you feel about yourself today has partly to do with messages you receive from yourself. These messages help you feel good or bad about yourself. When you identify, explore, and evaluate these messages, you can decide which you want to keep and which you don't. You can learn new ways to talk to yourself that help you develop healthy self-esteem.

Whether or not you open your mouth to speak, you actually “talk” to yourself all day long. There is a running dialogue inside your head, an inner voice sending you messages that affect how you feel about



yourself.

*I shouldn't have said that ... That was an awesome movie ... I really like her ... He's so rude ... I hate this class ... I can't believe I failed again ... This tastes awful.* The messages go on and on. Those that we tell about ourselves help create our self-esteem.

*When Skylar makes a mistake in a band concert, she tells herself I wish I hadn't done that, but I improved overall and that's awesome! When she doesn't have a date for the dance, she tells herself I still have great friends to spend the night with. Her positive self-messages help create healthy self-esteem.*

*When Steven makes a mistake in a band concert, he tells himself I'll never be good at this. When he doesn't have a date for the dance, he tells himself No one will ever go out with me. His negative self-messages help create unhealthy self-esteem.*

You have been telling yourself messages since you were a young child, although you weren't necessarily aware of them. As a young adult, you now have the ability to explore and pay attention to these self-messages. Then you can decide which to keep and which to let go of.

## try this

Think about the messages you have sent yourself throughout the course of your life. If you can't remember exactly, take a guess. What did you tell yourself when you:

Fell off your bike when you were first learning to ride?

\_\_\_\_\_

Had a hard time learning something in school?

\_\_\_\_\_

Were rejected by a friend?

\_\_\_\_\_

Didn't get the ball through the basketball hoop?

\_\_\_\_\_

Were reprimanded by your parents?

\_\_\_\_\_

Made a mistake?

\_\_\_\_\_

Weren't picked first for a team?

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Over the next few days, listen for your self-messages. Notice the responses you give yourself to situations that occur during the day. Record your messages in the chart below, keeping track of how many times you use them, and circle whether they make your self-esteem go up, go down, or stay the same.

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Self-Message	Number of Times Used	Self-Esteem		
		Up	Down	Same
		Up	Down	Same
		Up	Down	Same
		Up	Down	Same
		Up	Down	Same
		Up	Down	Same
		Up	Down	Same
		Up	Down	Same
		Up	Down	Same
		Up	Down	Same

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Circle any of these words that describe your self-messages. Use the blank lines to add your own words.

positive

harsh

kind

rational

demeaning

compassionate

caring

negative

fair

rude

irrational

considerate

gentle

offensive

loving

unfair

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How do your self-messages compare to the messages you would send to a friend?

better the same worse

## now try this

Write five messages you could send yourself to help create healthy self-esteem.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

Choose any of the following ways to send yourself each of these messages, and then follow through.

- Say this message out loud to yourself in front of a mirror.
- Send yourself this message in a text.
- Send yourself this message in an e-mail.
- Put this message on a sticky note where you will frequently see it.
- Write this message in your assignment book.
- Send yourself this message on a social networking site.
- Leave yourself this message on your voice mail.
- Write this message to yourself and mail it through the post office.

## today's affirmation

**I CHOOSE SELF-MESSAGES THAT HELP ME CREATE HEALTHY SELF-ESTEEM.**



## the truth about human worth

### know this

**E**very human being who ever lived came into this world with value and worth. There has never been an exception. This includes you.

There may be times when you believe you are flawed. You may think other people have value and worth but for some reason you don't. You may think that somewhere deep inside, you are just wrong.

It's hard to have healthy self-esteem when we believe so strongly in our defectiveness. A belief like this colors our outlook on everything—our relationships, our accomplishments, our activities—like a shadow

constantly hovering over us.

It is important to understand that this belief is false. It may seem true, but in this case, we cannot trust our thoughts. In fact, there is no human being without value and worth. There are not two rooms in the hospital nursery—one for babies born with value and one for babies born worthless. We all arrive as miracles. It is only our thoughts that tell us otherwise.

## try this

Think about any newborn baby you've ever met. If you don't know any, imagine one. Imagine that tiny child, newly arrived, taking its first breaths, completely helpless and dependent on its caregivers. Think about the miracle of its birth, and think about its innocence. Check any of the statements that a medical professional might tell this baby's parents.

“This baby isn't as good as the others.”

“It appears this child has no value.”

“You've created a human being with no worth.”

“This infant has absolutely no potential.”

“This child is wrong.”

“Your baby appears to be worthless.”

It might sound absurd to think of a doctor making any of these claims about a child. And it is. It is just as absurd to think any of these statements about yourself. You were that newborn infant at one time, and your value has not disappeared over time.

In the frame below, draw or paste a picture of yourself as a newborn. Write your full name on the line underneath.

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Copy this statement: “Unconditional, intrinsic human worth exists constantly despite changing achievements, failures, or external circumstances.”

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### now try this

List situations in which you have thought of yourself as worthless or flawed.

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Write what you told yourself at these times.

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Give any factual, verifiable information that could confirm that you actually have no value; for example, this was printed on your birth certificate, and you have a copy of it.

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Tell why you think you have come to believe that you are worthless or flawed.

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Using your own words, write a commitment to yourself to stop believing that lie.

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today's affirmation

**I HAVE THE SAME INNATE VALUE AND WORTH AS EVERY CHILD BORN INTO THIS WORLD.**